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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to serve as a model for school districts desiring to implement an elementary guidance program. Emphasis was placed upon grades K-6, although subjects extended into Grade 8. Approximately 450 boys and girls in each grade responded to questionnaires. In grades K-3, subjects responded to happy, neutral, or sad faces. In Grades 4-6, students circled a "Snoopy" dog depicting the three emotional states. Responses were collected and tabulated for each grade level. Findings show that all shifts were from happy feelings in kindergarten to sad feelings by Grade 6. In Kindergarten, 65.4% expressed happy feelings for school work, but by Grade 6 this had changed to 12.8 %. It appears that by Grades 7 and 8, the peer influence replaces a child's desire to be around grownups. Only 5% of eighth graders are happy to be in school, and 25% are sad. By Grade 8, the school has turned-off 95% of all students. There are no attitudinal shifts from sad or neutral to happy. Children seem to express a pattern of learned dislike for school. Programs for improving attitudes of teachers, administrators, parents, and children are necessary. (Author/JLL)

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Students Turned-Off By School

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Students Turned-Off By School

During the 1974-75 school year, the Penrsylvania Department of Education utilized ESEA Title III money to fund a study or the elementary schools in the Carlisle School District. This study was designed to serve as a model for other districts desiring to implement an Elementary Guidance program. The major thrust of the study was directed on grades K-6, although several questionnaires extended into the eighth grade.

There were approximately 450 boys and girls in each grade responding to the questionnaires. All data was collected in a three month period. In grades K-3, the students responded to one of three types of smiling faces: 1) happy; 2) neutral - neither happy nor sad feelings and 3) sad or unhappy. The responses to the twenty-six questions for kindergarten children are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

(10) ALL CARLISLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN RESPONSES TO FEELINGS ABOUT SELF

A survey rating demonstrating the frequency distribution, percentage of responses, and the statistical mean from kindergarten children on attitudes about self.

(1) ☺ - means you feel happy.
(2) 😐 - means you don't feel happy or sad but neutral.
(3) ☹ - means you feel unhappy.

	(1)		(2)		(3)		
	Freq.	- %	Freq.	- %	Freq.	- %	Mean
1. Is how I feel today.	376	81.7	36	7.8	20	4.3	1.18
2. Is myself alone.	113	24.6	121	26.3	192	41.7	2.19
3. Is myself with classmates.	323	70.2	54	11.7	52	11.3	1.37
4. Is myself at home.	365	79.3	48	10.4	28	6.1	1.24
5. Is myself with grownups at school.	370	80.4	45	9.8	28	6.1	1.23
6. Is myself with my friends.	354	77.0	54	11.7	17	3.7	1.21
7. Is myself at sports and games.	335	72.8	72	15.7	33	7.2	1.31
8. Is myself doing schoolwork.	301	65.4	80	17.4	56	12.2	1.44
9. Is myself talking in class.	313	68.0	68	14.8	59	12.8	1.42
10. Is myself on the playground.	390	84.8	33	7.2	23	5.0	1.18
11. Is myself doing something new.	324	70.4	76	16.5	44	9.6	1.37
12. Is myself being new in a group.	314	68.3	80	17.4	47	10.2	1.39
13. Is myself with boys.	255	55.4	48	10.4	125	27.2	1.70
14. Is myself with girls.	252	54.8	48	10.4	131	28.5	1.72
15. Is myself with grownups.	272	59.1	82	17.8	92	20.0	1.60
16. Is myself with strangers.	147	32.0	107	23.3	185	40.2	2.00
17. Is myself with bigger kids.	209	45.4	89	19.3	134	29.1	1.83
18. Is myself with smaller kids.	355	77.2	50	10.9	28	6.1	1.24
19. Is myself doing something hard.	154	33.5	108	23.5	174	37.8	2.05
20. Is myself doing something easy.	406	88.3	27	5.9	13	2.8	1.12

Table 1 (continued)

	(1) Freq.	- %	(2) Freq.	- %	(3) Freq.	- %	Mean
21. Is myself being the leader.	383	83.3	36	7.8	23	5.0	1.19
22. Is myself letting others be the leader.	129	28.0	71	15.4	232	50.4	2.24
23. Is myself going first.	388	84.3	33	7.2	20	4.3	1.17
24. Is myself reading or talking out loud.	278	60.4	66	14.3	94	20.4	1.58
25. Is myself when someone tries to help me.	405	88.0	23	5.0	22	4.8	1.15
26. Is myself deciding what to do.	366	79.6	51	11.1	32	7.0	1.26

In grades 4-6, the students circled a snoopy dog depicting the three emotional states of happy, neutral or sad. Teachers read each question aloud in grades 4-6, whereas in grades 7-8 the students completed the form with minimal assistance from the teacher.

Student responses were collected and tabulated for each grade level and presented in the same format as shown for Kindergarten students in Table 1. This data is available for interested persons (James, 1975).

Major Changes in Expressed Feelings

As elementary children grow and mature they learn to express their attitudes and feelings. Therefore, we should be able to measure this growth in expressed feelings and chart it's rate of change. To determine if there existed any change or movement in expressed feelings of elementary children, a comparison of significant mean difference between happy responses in kindergarten and happy responses in sixth grade was conducted. For the purpose of this study, a significant difference is a shift of .36 or more points between the kindergarten mean of the happy responses and the sixth grade mean of the happy responses.

These mean differences are shown in Table 2 along with a percentage comparison between the happy responses in kindergarten and grade six. The largest mean difference was .76 recorded for the question "Is myself with grownups". All questions beginning with 'is' were taken from the K-3 (faces) questionnaire. All questions beginning with 'how' were taken from the 4-6 (snoopy) questionnaire.

Table 2

Comparisons of Significant Differences in Mean Scores on Student Responses to Feelings about Self-questions for Carlisle School District.

Significant differences are defined as a shift of .36 or more points between kindergarten and sixth grade students.

N = 442 kindergarten students
N - 468 sixth grade students

Percent Happy K %	Percent Happy 6th %	Question	Mean Difference
59	7.2	Is myself with grownups.	.76
65.4	12.8	How do you feel doing your schoolwork.	.65
32	1.3	Is myself with strangers.	.63
80.4	27.3	How do you feel when you are with grownups in school.	.57
45.4	12.4	Is myself with bigger kids.	.50
77.2	41.8	How do you feel when you are bigger than anyone else.	.49
60.4	24.1	Is myself reading or talking outloud.	.45
81.7	51.0	How do you feel right now, here today.	.36

It is shocking to observe that all shifts were from happy feelings in kindergarten to sad feelings by grade six. Elementary children learned to fear grownups, stronger and bigger kids. The majority found reading and talking out loud to be a happy experience in kindergarten but an unhappy one in grade six. Although 65.4 percent expressed happy feelings for school work in kindergarten, by grade six this had changed to only 12.8 percent.

In order to fully appreciate the shifting of expressed feelings on "Is myself with grownups", a percentage response for grade levels K-8 was tabulated and is shown in Table 3. The responses were charted in figure 1 to demonstrate the patterns of change in expressed attitudes. The almost perfect reversal between happy and neutral responses and the small range of sad responses should be noted. There seems to be a rather direct relationship between the neutral and sad responses. It appears that by grade seven and eight the peer influence has replaced their desire to be around grownups.

Table 3

Is myself with grownups -

Grades	Happy	Neutral	Sad
Kindergarten	59.1	17.8	20.0
First	48.1	22.6	28.5
Second	29.3	39.4	31.3
Third	28.8	42.9	27.8
Fourth	15.6	42.8	41.0
Fifth	11.2	45.5	42.9
Sixth	59.1	17.8	20.0
Seventh	6.5	48.7	44.0
Eighth	6.5	52.1	40.3

Grades range in size between 400 - 550 students.

Table 4

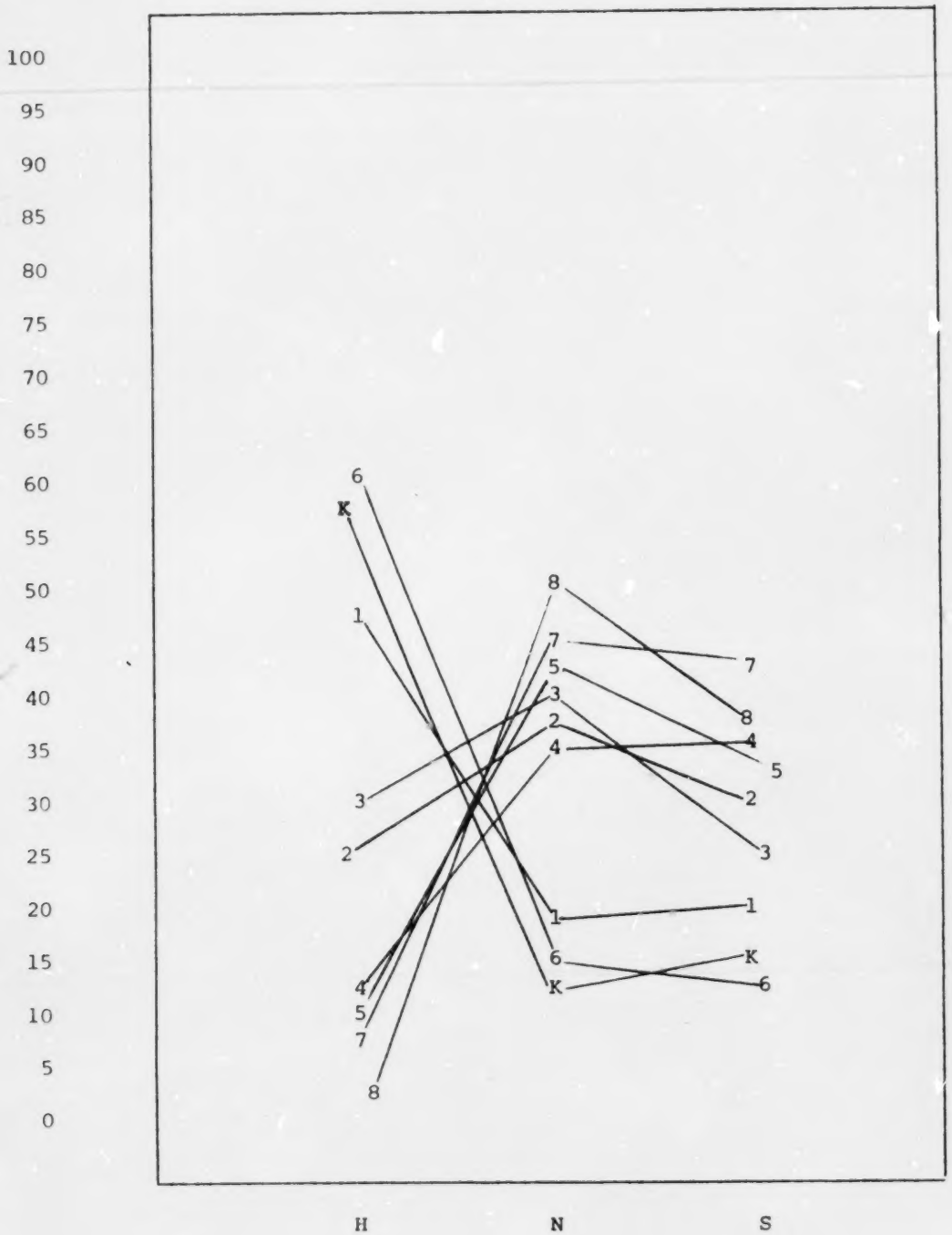
Carlisle School District Project

Kindergartan Through Eighth Grade Comparison

How do you feel when you are doing your school work?

Grades	Happy	Neutral	Sad
Kindergarten	65%	17%	12%
First	58%	25%	15%
Second	44%	34%	20%
Third	35%	43%	20%
Fourth	20%	48%	29%
Fifth	14%	60%	25%
Sixth	12.8	64.6	22.0
Seventh	7.5	64.4	27.1
Eighth	5.4	70	24.2

Figure 1

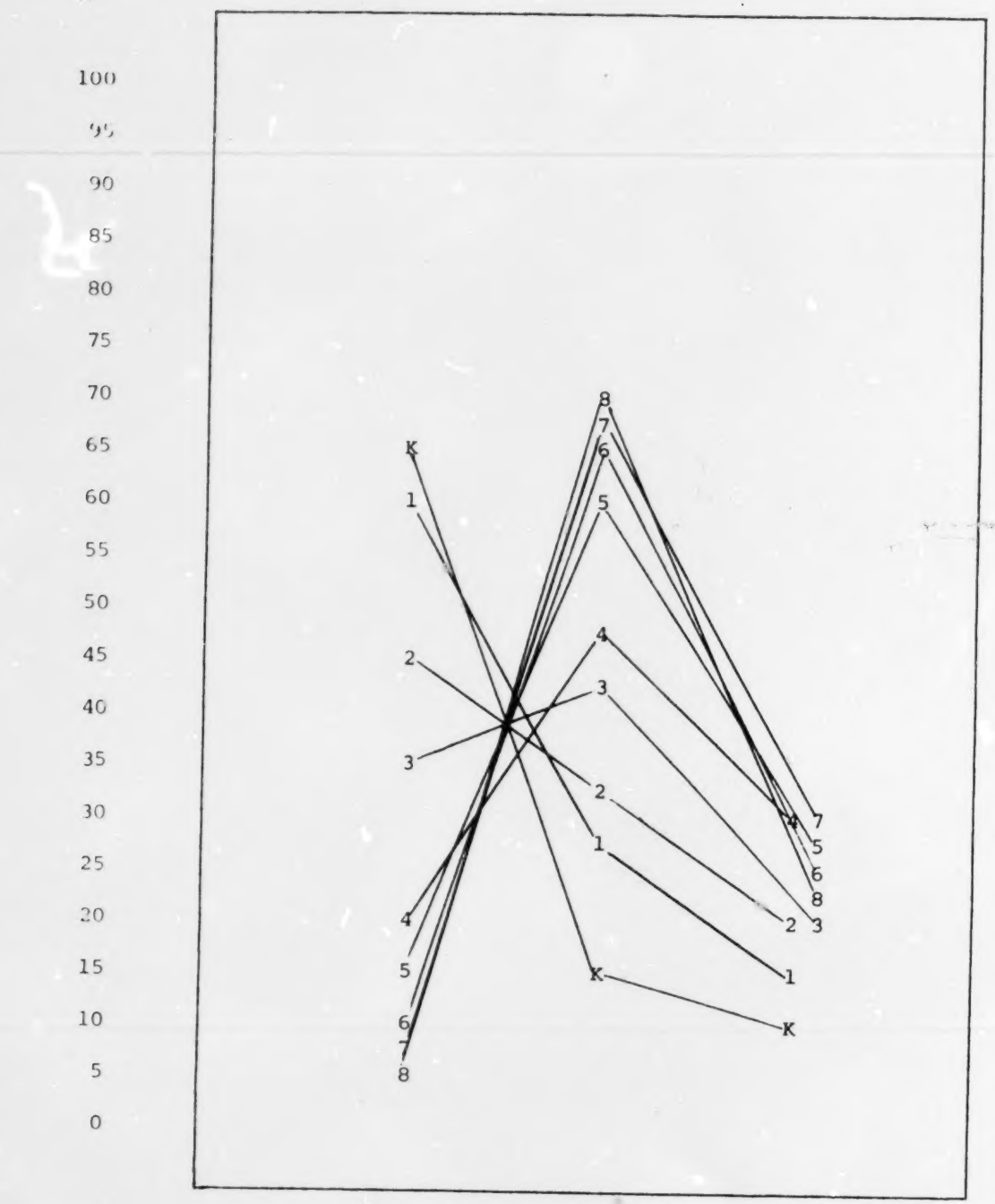


Is myself with grownups

Numbers = Grade Levels

Lines to demonstrate patterns.

Figure 2



K - Grade Eight - Comparison of percent of responses happy, neutral, sad.

How do you feel when you are doing school work?

The question "Is myself with grownups" pertained to feelings of a personal/social nature. The second question "How do you feel doing your school work?" should reveal some interesting data relative to feelings about education and the school. Table 4 is a plot of percentages for each grade level. Figure 2 is a chart of grade percentages of responses demonstrating almost a perfect switching from happy to neutral with a small range of sad responses. Only 5 percent of the students in grade eight are happy to be in school and one-fourth are sad. By grade eight the school has successfully turned-off 95% of all students.

A separate study on Guidance in Pennsylvania seems to verify the Carlisle study. This study included nineteen (19) Pennsylvania School Districts with 469 sixth grade students responding (Cormany, 1975). Students were requested to respond to the question, "How well do you enjoy attending school?"

Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
14.8	47.2	37.8

This survey, when compared to the Carlisle study, tended to reduce the percentage of sometimes responses and increase the percent of seldom responses with only a 2 percent change in the percent of usually responses. Yet, 37.8 percent of sixth grade students seldom enjoy attending school. There is no doubt that students learn to dislike school each year they attend.

Little Change in Expressed Attitude

One final comparison was conducted in the Carlisle study. The mean differences on responses to questions that demonstrated little or no change between kindergarten and grade six were computed. The three questions reflecting little, if any, shift pertained to myself on the playground, myself alone and myself at sports and games. The first and third were somewhat related. Better than seventy-five percent of the children liked sports and playground activities in kindergarten and continued to like them in grade six. School did not change their attitudes toward these activities. Twenty-four percent of the children were happy being alone in kindergarten and fourteen percent at grade six. Fewer children liked being alone by grade six, although there were still a small number (14%) of children who expressed happiness at being alone.

Final Observation

The results of this study seem to indicate that schools are turning-off children. The child enters school relatively uninhibited and not afraid to express happy feelings. Is the child learning from the school not to express these happy feelings but to protect or shelter them and reply in a more neutral manner? Perhaps this attitudinal move toward neutrality is a human maturity trait and not learned in school.

We also might ask - does a child have to like school to learn? Life is not all milk and honey so perhaps it is natural for the child to begin to express independent feelings. However, it appears that our clients are expressing a pattern of learned dislike for the present school.

Another interesting fact of this study was that there were no attitudinal shifts from sad or neutral to happy. The few questions relative to playground and being alone remained about the same but no questions indicated children had sad feelings in kindergarten that were changed to happy feelings by grade six. All responses were from happy to neutral to sad.

Practical Application

Theorical studies have little meaning unless there is a practical application for them. What can elementary counselors, teachers and administrators do to make school a happier place for kids to learn?

Perhaps each school should establish a Happiness Committee or an Affective Environmental Study Team to assess the attitudes expressed by their local school community toward learning and school attendance. The tight economic times have caused many negative attitudes among and between educators.

The first step in the improvement of any attitudinal change program is for each of us to assess our own attitude and strive for improvement. Planned programs for improving the attitudes of teachers, administrators, parents and children must be designed and implemented. The future of our schools and indeed our country depends on quick and decisive action by all educators. Schools must begin turning-on students.

References

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James, W., Initial Transitional Elementary Supportive Services, ESEA Title III Project, Carlisle School District, Carlisle, PA, 1975.